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# The Anatomy of Apology and Forgiveness: Towards Transformative Apology and Forgiveness

Joram Tarusarira\*

## ABSTRACT

The central thesis of this article is that while apology and forgiveness are vital for dealing with a violent past, there is a need to critically transform the sociopolitical epistemic subjectivities that underpin a wrongdoing. These include political discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies that justified the wrongdoing in the first place and are thus its bedrock. This is against the understanding that brutality and violence are sustained by particular epistemologies, logics and reasonings. Failure to bring about their transformation results in not stopping the repetition of brutality and not realizing sustainable reconciliation, as well as stifling key aspects of dealing with the past, such as truth seeking, truth telling, justice and accountability. By drawing on the state-sponsored massacres in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s – the Gukurahundi massacres – this article argues that current calls for, and implementations of, apologies and forgiveness are often undertaken without considering the need to transform the epistemic bedrock of conflict and violence which engenders apology and forgiveness. This lack of focus on transformation makes apology and forgiveness susceptible to abuse or underutilization, and thus impotent in facilitating sustainable reconciliation. The article emphasizes the need to transform the cognitive and epistemic subjectivities underpinning wrongdoing, thus making a case for transformative apology and forgiveness.

**KEYWORDS:** apology, forgiveness, reconciliation, transformation, Zimbabwe

## INTRODUCTION

In postconflict societies, it is important to deal with past atrocities as part of transitional justice and reconciliation. Among the numerous dynamics involved are public apologies and their correlated forgiveness. Official or corporate public apologies are nothing new. Cases in point that contribute to what commentators have dubbed ‘the age of apology’ include the Japanese government’s apology to Korean ‘comfort women’ forced into prostitution during World War Two; the British apology to the Irish for the 19th-century potato famine; the Canadian apology to the native people of Canada for abuses in government-sponsored residential schools; and the apology

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extended by the Ontario premier to the three surviving Dionne quintuplets for exploitation of their childhood and abuse of their trust fund.<sup>1</sup> Apologies for colonial enterprises seem to have joined the list, even though 'political elites reflect ambivalence about certain human rights violations; persist in glorifying or sanitising the violent colonial past; recycle paternalistic and hierarchical discourses and policies towards the apology's recipients; and offer contradictory notions of the state's historical responsibility,' thus demonstrating the gap between injustice inflicted and injustice acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> In the Zimbabwean context, one of the moments for which an apology has been called is the Gukurahundi massacre in which more than 20,000 people from the Ndebele ethnic group were murdered by the military.<sup>3</sup> This article argues that while apology and forgiveness are vital for dealing with a violent past, when uncritically undertaken these actions do not transform discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies that justified the wrongdoing in the first place. This is against the understanding that brutality and violence are sustained by particular epistemologies, logics and reasonings. Lack of transformation results in failure to stop a repeat of the brutality; not uprooting the logics behind violence engenders reconciliation that is not sustainable; and not instigating truth seeking or pursuing justice and accountability stifles key aspects of dealing with the past, such as truth seeking, truth telling, justice and accountability, given that uncritical, unsophisticated and simplistic apology and forgiveness tend to sweep them under the carpet. The immediacy and overtness of physical and psychological harm often blinds victims and those willing to address violence and brutality to the covert logics behind the wrongdoing, leading them to emphasize reform and rehabilitation. To advance this argument, this article reviews extant literature on apology and forgiveness, arguing that it fails to address the *transformative* element of apology and forgiveness. Using the case study of the Gukurahundi massacres in Zimbabwe, the article demonstrates why the transformative aspect is essential to breaking the cycle of violence as well as facilitating sustainable reconciliation. It brings to the fore the need to transform cognitive and epistemic subjectivities underpinning wrongdoing, and argues that apology and forgiveness need to be agential. In doing so, it introduces concepts of transformative apology and forgiveness.

### THE CASE OF GUKURAHUNDI

Former president Robert Mugabe and his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), unleashed an operation known as Gukurahundi upon the second largest tribe, the Ndebele people, in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987. This was in response to sporadic

- 1 Trudy Govier and Wilhelm J. Verwoerd, 'The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33(1) (2002): 67–82; Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud and Niklaus Steiner, eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing up to the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For a list of types of apologies, see, Michael Cunningham, 'Saying Sorry: The Politics of Apology,' *Political Quarterly* 70(3) (1999): 285–293.
- 2 Tom Bentley, 'The Sorrow of Empire: Rituals of Legitimation and the Performative Contradictions of Liberalism,' *Review of International Studies* 41(3) (2015): 623.
- 3 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

outbreaks of violence that began before independence at guerrilla assembly points and continued into the early 1980s. The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA, the military wing of the Zimbabwean African National Union, or ZANU) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA, the military wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union, or ZAPU) often clashed during the liberation struggle. The wartime clashes were built on the two guerrilla armies' regional patterns of recruitment and operation during the 1970s. ZAPU recruited predominantly from Ndebele-speaking Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands provinces, and ZANU primarily from the Shona-speaking provinces of Mashonaland, Manicaland and Masvingo. The outbreaks between these two groups were also caused by the history of animosity between their political leaders.<sup>4</sup> Identities and categorizations of ZIPRA/Ndebele and ZANLA/Shona were therefore formed during the liberation struggle and carried over into independent Zimbabwe. The Ndebele people now perceive the Shona as responsible for Gukurahundi.

The violence was committed by ZANLA, ZIPRA and ex-combatants, against each other and sometimes against civilians. 'Dissidents' broke away from the national army because of what they claimed to be political bias in favour of former ZANLA cadres, especially where promotions were concerned.<sup>5</sup> Former ZIPRA comrades in the national army were increasingly subjected to arrests, detention and harassment by the Central Intelligence Organization.<sup>6</sup> By 1982, Zimbabwe had a serious and complex security problem, especially in the western half of the country. The regime accused the dissidents of killing civilians and destroying property, responding with a massive clampdown on Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. To justify and facilitate the crackdown, as well as repression and criminalization of real or perceived political dissent, the government, despite the reconciliation policy that was announced by Mugabe at independence, reverted to using the law and legal discourses, drawing on institutions and practices from the 1970s. The dissident problem was seen as a problem of law and order requiring extraordinary powers, which could only be catered for by the emergency powers legislation.<sup>7</sup> ZANU–PF accused ZAPU and the Ndebele people of refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the government and suspected them of wanting to oust ZANU–PF from power. The solution seemingly lay in shooting down ZAPU members and the Ndebele people and crushing their alleged leader, Joshua Nkomo.<sup>8</sup> Civilians were accused of harbouring the dissidents. Within weeks, North Korean-trained 5th Brigade soldiers – a special army created to deal with the dissident problem – massacred and tortured thousands of civilians. 'Massacres, mass beatings and destruction of property occurred in the village setting, in front of thousands of witnesses,' reported the Catholic Commission for Justice

4 Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

5 Joram Tarusarira, 'Revisiting Zimbabwe's Celebratory History in Pursuit of Peace and Reconciliation,' in *Sources and Methods for African History and Culture: Essays in Honour of Adam Jones*, ed. Geert Castryk, Silke Strickrodt and Katja Werthmann (Leipzig: University of Leipzig, 2016).

6 Chengetai J.M. Zvobgo, *A History of Zimbabwe, 1890–2000 and Postscript, Zimbabwe, 2001–2008* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

7 George Karekwaivanane, *The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

8 Alexander et al., *supra* n 4.

and Peace in Zimbabwe, which, while still contested by some quarters, remains a valuable report on the massacres.<sup>9</sup>

The 5th Brigade did not allow mourning of the dead. This was even more strongly enforced if the victim was killed over allegations of being a 'sell-out.' To mourn a sell-out would label the mourner a sell-out as well. In some instances, relatives who mourned their loved one were shot. Consequently, people suffered the loss of their loved ones in silence, and sometimes even took part in the killing.<sup>10</sup> Victims of the violence were buried in mass graves;<sup>11</sup> it was characteristic to neglect the corpses and leave them where they fell, with burial in the accepted place or manner forbidden. The accepted manner includes how the corpse should lie in the grave – according to Ndebele culture, the body of the deceased is placed sideways and facing south, where the Ndebele originated from – as well as following the proper religious service and rituals. Not doing so results in an undignified death, severing the dead from their ancestors, their kin and their community. Bodies were also left inside huts where people had burnt to death; others were buried at 5th Brigade camps or dumped into mineshafts.<sup>12</sup> Families were thus left without a body to mourn over, including in cases where victims were 'missing' or 'disappeared' – taken from their homes at night or in mysterious circumstances or detained and never seen again.<sup>13</sup> Despite these atrocities, the plight of victims remains unacknowledged and the state continues to deny any serious culpability for events during those years, with President Emmerson Mnangagwa's 'refusal' to apologize being a case in point. The report of the Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry into the Matabeleland and Midlands massacre was never made public, and the Clemency Order of 1988, after the Unity Accord in 1987, pardoned all violations committed by all parties between 1982 and the end of 1987.<sup>14</sup> That covered the Matabeleland atrocities, without full knowledge and acknowledgement of what had transpired. The ZANU–PF regime has not offered an official apology, justice, reparations or any form of healing process.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-Mugabe era, the world has been interested in what Mnangagwa will do regarding the atrocities. When he appeared at the World Economic Forum in Davos<sup>16</sup> in 2018, he took the opportunity to announce a new political dispensation

9 Ibid.; Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *supra* n 3.

10 Shari Eppel, "Healing the Dead": Exhumation and Reburial as Truth-Telling and Peace-Building Activities in Rural Zimbabwe,' in *Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies*, ed. Tristan A. Borer (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

11 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *supra* n 3.

12 Terence Osborn Ranger, 'Dignifying Death: The Politics of Burial in Bulawayo, 1893 to 1960,' *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34(1/2) (2004): 110–144.

13 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *supra* n 3.

14 Luc Huyse, 'Zimbabwe: Why Reconciliation Failed,' in *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook*, ed. David Bloomfield, Teresa Barnes and Luc Huyse (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2003).

15 Dumisani Ngwenya and Geoff Harris, 'The Consequences of Not Healing: Evidence from the Gukurahundi Violence in Zimbabwe,' *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 15(2) (2015): 35–55.

16 'The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation. The Forum engages the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas. It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.' See, <https://www.weforum.org/about/world-economic-forum> (accessed 28 February 2019).

to the economic world. In a widely broadcast media appearance, journalist Mishal Husain posed the much-awaited question – whether, as the leader of a new dispensation, Mnangagwa would apologize for the Gukurahundi atrocities. He replied:

In my view, there is nothing more than me putting legislation where [there is] a commission headed by the Vice President and most eminent persons in Zimbabwe to deal with that issue and make recommendations. At the time in 1987 my former President and the president of Zapu, the late Vice President Joshua Nkomo, came together and signed the Unity Accord which ended that conflict.<sup>17</sup>

This response caused a stir in the media and among human rights activists, who argued that he had missed an opportunity to apologize for Gukurahundi. This article argues that demanding an apology in front of the cameras, as was the case in Davos, is a problematic proposition when located within the broader *process* of reconciliation. To challenge the call for apologies in this context might appear to be supporting Mnangagwa's position that he appointed a commission to look into the legacies of violence in Zimbabwe, including Gukurahundi. It might also raise the question of whether we need apologies at all, rather than declarations, denouncements and improved policy going forward. This article argues that apologies remain necessary because they capture other elements, such as their therapeutic effect, which declarations, denouncements and improved policy cannot achieve, especially considering that the latter mechanisms cannot best address people's relational and emotional sides.

Being cognizant of the fact that politicians can abuse the past in the name of creating a shared history and hence future, this article also casts light on possible abuses of the past via apologies.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, apologies appear to be a simplistic, elitist and unsophisticated way to handle *mass* atrocities, whose magnitude requires a deeper engagement. Secondly, they risk subjecting victims to secondary victimization since, pursuant to an apology, victims might be pressurized to forgive even when they are not ready to do so. Thirdly, they risk being reduced to an event rather than a process leading to moral and practical amends. Fourthly, apologies assume that all is known about violent pasts and that all that remains to be done is to apologize. Yet, in many instances, much still remains unknown and that which is recorded is disputed. Lastly, apologies do not provide the opportunity to engage with the epistemic bedrock – the discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies – underlying the brutality. The fact that similar types of operations have continued to occur in Zimbabwe, for instance Murambatsvina/Operation Restore Order, proves that the bedrock of Gukurahundi remains intact. No wonder Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to Gukurahundi as a leit-motif of ZANU–PF.<sup>19</sup> My contention that there were discourses, narratives, ideas

17 'President Mnangagwa's Interview at Davos WEF 2018,' YouTube video, 32:11, 24 January 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLVWGEIw4aI> (accessed 28 February 2019).

18 Marie-Claire Lavabre and Dimitri Nicolaïdis, 'Can We Act on Memory... in the Mediterranean? The Case of Algeria,' in *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*, ed. Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaïdis (London: Tauris, 2010).

19 Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013).



and ideologies behind Gukurahundi is supported by former apartheid spy Kevin Woods, who penetrated Zimbabwe's intelligence apparatus in key positions relating to the conflict in Matabeleland. He became a top Central Intelligence Organization administrative officer in Bulawayo<sup>20</sup> and met Mugabe many times to give him security briefings during Gukurahundi. Woods stated that Gukurahundi was a genocide because the 5th Brigade did not directly target the few dissidents in Matabeleland, but instead intended to eliminate the Ndebele people. He claimed that Gukurahundi was meant to keep Mugabe in power, as he believed he was the saviour of Zimbabwe and wanted everyone else to believe that too.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that dealing only with the overt and physical effects of Gukurahundi, without acknowledging the issue as a leitmotif, will not prevent a repeat of similar violence, and reconciliation will not be sustainable. While it is important and necessary to address the physical harm caused by Gukurahundi, not going deeper to explore ideologies that underpin genocides and conceptions of power, and how to get and secure it, might mean that the same could happen again. Zimbabwe has many examples to prove the point.

Despite the 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU–PF and ZAPU, which was meant to settle the dissident problem and reconcile the two parties and their supporters, the wounds of Gukurahundi remain raw. This article argues that a call for an apology must be critical rather than simplistic, lest it stifle other vital elements such as truth telling, acknowledgement, justice, forgiveness and victim engagement, which are at the centre of reconciliation and dealing with the past. While much has been written on apology and its correlate – the intended or expected effect of forgiveness – the assumption has been that it is necessary to present a connection between apology and forgiveness.<sup>22</sup> This article argues that such a connection is unnecessary, despite the assumption that an apology is an implicit plea for forgiveness. The article thus also challenges uncritical forgiveness and argues instead for *transformative* forgiveness. Furthermore, it argues that transformative apologies can enable forgiveness while not being a prerequisite for it.

### CONCEPTUALIZING APOLOGY

Numerous conceptions and types of apology exist. John Searle considers apologies expressive speech acts because they express feelings of sorrow about what has been done.<sup>23</sup> But apologies are more than just expressive speech acts. Key propositional presuppositions accompany them:

To apologize for an action is to admit that one did it, that it was wrong and harmful to the victim, and that one was responsible for doing it. It is also to

20 Bill Berkeley, 'Apartheid's Spies,' *Washington Post*, 22 October 1989, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1989/10/22/apartheids-spies/78cac89e-ec8b-4c3e-87a7-8afc1c778c81/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.9211a307e4a2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1989/10/22/apartheids-spies/78cac89e-ec8b-4c3e-87a7-8afc1c778c81/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9211a307e4a2) (accessed 28 February 2019).

21 'Interview with Former Apartheid Spy Kevin Woods,' *Soundcloud*, <https://soundcloud.com/zenzele1/sets/my-playlist> (accessed 28 February 2019).

22 Kent Bach, 'Meaning, Speech Acts, and Communication,' in *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Robert M. Harnish (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994).

23 John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

commit oneself not to commit similar acts against the victim or victims again, and in general to behave in a moral way towards them.<sup>24</sup>

While this conception denotes future commitment to refrain from committing similar acts, it remains tied to the present victim. It does not indicate a broader commitment to not doing the same to other potential victims, nor does it commit the wrongdoer to actively transforming the conditions that justified the wrongdoing in the first place. This victim focus does not concern itself with, and might undermine, broader epistemic transformations, which are a key aspect of dealing with a violent past.

Nicholas Tavuchis interprets apology as a speech act in which the speaker expresses sorrow and regret to seek forgiveness from the person wronged.<sup>25</sup> He claims that in committing a moral wrong, a person violates and jeopardizes one or more relationships. Hence, an apology is an effort to restore the relationships. A wholehearted apology, received as such by the wronged person, may inspire forgiveness. Not all apologies are accepted, but they can influence a shift in attitude. While Tavuchis considers a shift in attitude as the 'mysterious' outcome of apology,<sup>26</sup> I argue that moral and practical amends in communities ravaged by violence, to the extent of disrupting their livelihoods, can contribute significantly to attitude shift, thereby challenging the 'mystery of apology' claim in particular. Like Searle's conception,<sup>27</sup> Tavuchis' victim focus does not concern itself with and undermines broader epistemic transformation.<sup>28</sup>

According to Martin Golding, an apology has a purpose, which is to make moral and/or material amends.<sup>29</sup> We are called upon to express 'other'-oriented moral regret and to appeal for forgiveness. Moral regret involves acknowledgement of our responsibility for wrongdoing. In this process, it is critical not to negate the justifiability of the injured party's resentment. Material amends refer to the willingness of perpetrators to undertake concrete measures which can practically address the damage that was done.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis on apology as moral and practical amends focuses on the expression of sorrow and redress, respectively, but does not prioritize transforming the bedrock that facilitates heinous deeds. Thus, Golding's conceptualization does not speak to how the epistemic foundation that gave rise to the wrongdoing can be transformed to ensure a 'never again.' There is therefore a need to push the boundaries beyond moral amends to cognitive amends. Such a move would advance truth telling, a key element in dealing with the past.

Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd claim that those who apologize for a serious wrong indicate acknowledgement, which is three-dimensional: firstly, wrongdoers acknowledge wrongdoing by themselves or the group or institution they represent. In

24 Joram Graf Haber, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Study* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), 89.

25 Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

26 Ibid.

27 Searle, *supra* n 23.

28 Tavuchis, *supra* n 25.

29 Martin Golding, 'Forgiveness and Regret,' *Philosophical Forum* 16(1) (1984): 121–137.

30 Ibid.



doing so, they admit that the act was wrong and that they were responsible for it. The admission is addressed to the victim/s of the wrongdoing. Secondly, in apologizing, offenders acknowledge the moral status of the victim/s being apologized to. The act was wrong, and, in doing it, offenders (or those they represent) injured the victim/s, who did not merit or deserve the ill-treatment. Thirdly, offenders acknowledge the legitimacy of the victim/s' feelings of resentment and anger in response to the wrong. This resentment and related feelings are justified.<sup>31</sup> Govier and Verwoerd's conception of apology, like Golding's,<sup>32</sup> is laudable for respecting the legitimacy of victims' resentment and anger, which are often condemned and viewed negatively (discussed later). However, like the other conceptions of apology mentioned here, the entire focus is on current victims. A commitment to transforming the narratives, ideas and ideologies underlying the atrocities, which is necessary to stop their recurrence, can only be assumed. Moral apology, understood as an expression of sorrow for moral wrongdoing, implies a request for forgiveness. This means that it constitutes acknowledgement of wrongdoing but excludes explaining why the wrong was done. However, mere acknowledgement is not necessarily constitutive of a transformation of consciousness, attitudes and assumptions. That said, acknowledgement assists in the necessary healing process because it creates room for dialogue about the brutality and the fact that it is often based on ignorance and erroneous assumptions about victims and their identity.<sup>33</sup>

Apologies are susceptible to abuse in numerous ways. For instance, accepting responsibility has come to mean agreeing to a plea *even while denying guilt*; rich offenders tend to get more credit for their remorse than poor ones; and elite attorneys can coach defendants on how to use their remorse to maximal strategic benefit, that is, how to express it, when to manifest it and when to avoid it. Apology is *not synonymous with an admission of guilt*. It can be a tactical defence and an 'attitudinal structuring tactic' in order to 'lubricate settlement discussions'.<sup>34</sup>

What is missing, therefore, is a *transformative* apology, which I define as not only retrospective but also futuristic, and not only focused on the present victim but also on potential future victims. It demonstrates an appreciation of the epistemic foundations and conditions that form the bedrock of and facilitate the wrongdoing, with the intention of transforming them to ensure that the same offence is not repeated. An apology whose sole focus is the act of violence deals with the past only by redress: 'I killed your goat; I will replace the goat.' Transformative apology, on the other hand, facilitates fundamental change: 'I killed your goat; I will replace the goat, but also ensure that negative discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies that made me see it as acceptable to kill your goat are ruptured within me and those who share the same mentality so that the same wrongdoing does not happen again to you or others.' Transformation here should not be understood as reform or

31 Trudy Govier and Wilhelm J. Verwoerd, 'Taking Wrongs Seriously: A Qualified Defence of Public Apologies,' *Saskatchewan Law Review* 65 (2002): 153–176.

32 Golding, *supra* n 29.

33 Trudy Govier, 'What Is Acknowledgement and Why Is it Important?' <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1845&context=ossaarchive> (accessed 28 February 2019).

34 Nick Smith, 'Sorry but Not Sorry,' 2014, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-the-public-apology-became-a-tool-of-power-and-privilege> (accessed 28 February 2019).

rehabilitation. Reform focuses on restructuring systems and structures, which is part of practical amends. Transformation transcends moral and practical apology. It considers the logic behind an act of brutality, on the understanding that behind violence and brutality lie discourses, narratives and practices that justify it. Reforming systems and structures is no guarantee that the epistemic bedrock of the wrongdoing has been subverted. Transformation further interrogates how the 'other' is perceived and through what lenses, narratives or paradigms this is mediated. Rehabilitation after violence and brutality tends to focus on the physical and psychological healing of victims. It thus focuses on the individual harmed. Healing a victim physically and psychologically does not say anything about the perpetrator, especially whether they see their wrongdoing as such and whether they have changed their thinking or its basis. The transformative dimension of apology incorporates the reparative and rehabilitative dimensions but adds an epistemic dimension by uprooting the logic behind the offence, thereby ensuring its nonrepetition. Transformative apology thus not only caters to the individual, as rehabilitation does, but also has a broader societal effect.

An apology is not a sufficient condition for forgiveness, and the latter cannot be purchased but only enabled and persuaded by (transformative) apologies. During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, many statements of forgiveness were accompanied by certain requirements of what the perpetrators should do in order to earn the forgiveness: confessing, showing remorse or paying for medical care for the victims.<sup>35</sup> They may thus have been reparative (practical amends) but were not transformative. The absence of a necessary connection between an apology and forgiveness means that the absence of apology does not mean forgiveness is not required, and not expecting forgiveness should not get in the way of an apology. In some cases, an apology may serve a perpetrator's emotional needs but not those of the victim. Thus, forgiveness is not guaranteed. Similarly, forgiveness may serve the emotional needs of the victim but not necessarily those of the offender, especially if the offender expects forgiveness. A victim may forgive for her own sake, to free herself from the burden of anger and hatred, but that does not mean that the offender avoids justice.

Evident from these conceptions of apology is that the lack of emphasis on the epistemic transformation of discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies makes forgiveness the target of, or the expected response to, an apology. Apologies are focused on demonstrating sorrow and reparation to highlight that the offender has come to the realization that he should not have carried out the wrongdoing. Convincing the victim to forgive, understood as overcoming negative emotions such as anger, hatred and resentment, which are *natural* responses to wrongdoing,<sup>36</sup> becomes the goal. Forgiveness hence becomes an expectation that is anchored in the past, with no reference to the future. It becomes an acknowledgement of the apology for the wrongs done in the past, but does not necessarily involve creating conditions to ensure that

35 Rebecca Saunders, 'Questionable Associations: The Role of Forgiveness in Transitional Justice,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5(1) (2011): 119–141.

36 Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the same wrongs are not repeated. Often mediators and negotiators assume that a change in structures and systems is enough to prevent a repeat of notoriety and brutality and ensure sustainable reconciliation. I argue that there is a need to unravel and transform the conditions behind the systems and structures if sustainable reconciliation is to be realized and violence arrested. In the context of transitional justice, an uncritical and simplistic apology does not contribute to sustainable peace and reconciliation – neither does forgiveness that is not transformative. A critical and sophisticated forgiveness is one that prioritizes correcting the wrong done as well as ensuring that the epistemic conditions for a ‘never again’ are effected.

### CONCEPTUALIZING FORGIVENESS

The notion of forgiveness is contested. Questions remain regarding whether it is a feeling, a rational decision or an act; whether it is unconditional or dependent on the remorse of a perpetrator; whether it is primarily a self-help strategy for victims or, conversely, a gesture of interpersonal reconciliation; whether one forgives a person or an act; and what relation, if any, forgiveness bears to amnesty.<sup>37</sup> Current research on forgiveness is dominated by religious studies scholars, theologians and psychologists,<sup>38</sup> who focus on its therapeutic dimension or its implementation as a practice of faith. It is hence not subjected to discourse analysis. I argue that scholars fixate on the personal change of individuals without addressing broader sociopolitical change. Reconciliation is both individual and societal, with the individual embedded in the social dimension. An entirely individual focus thus overlooks the fact that reconciliation is a dialectical, multilevel process. Discourse scholars who study interactions and social practices, meaning making and larger meaning systems, contests and conflicts around collective identities, social norms, subjectification and subjectivities<sup>39</sup> are conspicuously absent from research on forgiveness.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, forgiveness is subjected to critical dissection and analysis. Everett Worthington’s pyramid model of forgiveness, for instance, proposes inducing empathy and humility in victims.<sup>41</sup> However, this risks burdening victims, who might be characterized as resentful and vindictive if they do not forgive and reconcile.<sup>42</sup>

37 Saunders, *supra* n 35.

38 Robert Enright, *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001); Michael E. McCullough, Steven J. Sandage and Everett L. Worthington Jr., *To Forgive Is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Everett L. Worthington Jr., ed., *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Rodney L. Petersen, ‘A Theology of Forgiveness: Terminology, Rhetoric, and the Dialectic of Interfaith Relationships,’ in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002).

39 Stephanie Taylor, *What Is Discourse Analysis?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

40 Saunders, *supra* n 35.

41 Everett L. Worthington Jr., ed., *Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998).

42 Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008).

Robert Enright and colleagues define forgiveness as the

willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her.<sup>43</sup>

Transformative forgiveness appreciates letting go of anger and resentment, but to ensure sustainable peace and reconciliation without burdening the victim, it foregrounds rupturing the discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies in the perpetrator that led to or permitted the wrongdoing.<sup>44</sup> Rather than changes in the things for which victims strive,<sup>45</sup> such as healing and reparation, it entails shifts in the epistemic conditions that obstruct that for which we strive. In so doing, truth telling goes beyond factual truths to underlying discourses and narratives.

Forgiveness has been anchored on the concept of 'reframing,' understood as a process 'whereby the wrongdoer is viewed in context, in an attempt to build up a complete picture of the wrongdoer and his actions.'<sup>46</sup> Typically, this involves understanding the pressures that the wrongdoer was under at the time of the offence and appreciating the wrongdoer's personality as a result of his or her particular developmental history. The expected benefit is that the victim will be able to separate the offence from the offender and 'understand the offender's...basic human worth.'<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, transcending their victimhood and psychic preoccupation with a perpetrator

helps resolve feelings of remorse, guilt, anger, anxiety, and fear; increases the sense of personal empowerment that comes from taking a situation in hand and increases self-esteem and hope, as well as decrease anxiety and depression.<sup>48</sup>

The reframing concept and this romanticization of forgiveness might be inappropriate. By changing the focus from the victim to the perpetrator, forgiveness serves the perpetrator. A paradox of remorse should be guarded against, that is, a situation in which

43 Robert D. Enright, Suzanne Freedman and Julio Rique, 'The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness,' in *Exploring Forgiveness*, ed. Robert D. Enright and Joanna North (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 46–47.

44 Patricia Cranton, 'Transformative Learning,' in *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education*, ed. Leona M. English (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jack Mezirow, 'Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,' in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

45 Kenneth I. Pargament and Mark S. Rye, 'Forgiveness as a Method of Religious Coping,' in Worthington, supra n 41; Norvin Richards, *Humility* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992); Alice T. Clark, 'Humility,' in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992); June P. Tangney, 'Humility,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. Shane J. Lopez and Charles R. Snyder (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

46 Enright et al., supra n 43 at 24.

47 Ibid., 54.

48 Cited in Saunders, supra n 35 at 123.

the perpetrator is the one who appears to be wounded, who is begging to be re-admitted into the realm of moral humanity and the burden of rehumanizing a torturer falls on the shoulder of the tortured.<sup>49</sup>

Instead, the burden must be on the offender. Another burden placed on the victim is that of response after an apology. The victim has to evaluate a perpetrator's veracity, motives and sincerity. Furthermore, as Saunders observes, positioning perpetrators as suffering risks casting them as being just as victimized as those they have injured.<sup>50</sup> This positioning potentially homogenizes forms of suffering that are vastly different. Numerous variances, such as the nature and degree of psychological versus physical wounds, get overlooked. The net effect of this approach is that effort is expended on creating conditions or frameworks (e.g. reframing) to help the victim forgive, and not on addressing and transforming the conditions that caused the wrongdoing in the first place. Placing the focus and burden on the victim instead of on the perpetrator is an affront to the reconciliation process, at whose centre lies the healing of victims. According to Howard Zehr

forgiveness is letting go of the power the offense and the offender have over a person. It means no longer letting that offense and offender dominate. Without this experience of forgiveness, without this closure, the wound festers, the violation takes over our consciousness, our lives. It, and the offender, are in control. Real forgiveness, then, is an act of empowerment and healing. It allows one to move from victim to survivor.<sup>51</sup>

Zehr focuses on empowering victims to move on; their transition from victim to victor does not factor in the perpetrator. He is silent on whether perpetrators rupture their epistemic point of departure in doing the wrong. If not, there is no guarantee that the perpetrator or others will not do the same again to the victim in question or to other victims.

### INTERFACE OF ANGER AND RESENTMENT, APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness has been hailed as morally superior to harbouring resentment and other 'negative' emotions. Victims who express their willingness to forgive or who testify in court with decorum are commonly admired and appreciated because they are seen to embody magnanimity, strength and humanity – and they provide reasons to hope that recovery and reconciliation are possible even in the worst cases.<sup>52</sup> However, 'negative' emotions and attitudes of anger and resentment do not necessarily have negative effects. In fact, they can be positive and transformative, and ensure that the values we uphold and are passionate about are brought into being. Forgiveness without appreciating victims' concomitant anger and resentment risks being distorted

49 Cited in Saunders, *supra* n 35 at 136.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*, 3rd ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 47

52 Brudholm, *supra* n 42.

and cheapened. In addition, as Thomas Brudholm observes,<sup>53</sup> when dealing with extreme horrors and evildoers, forgiveness can be a temptation, a promise of relief, that is morally dubious. A refusal to forgive may represent a more demanding moral accomplishment. Forgiveness and compassion are thus not necessarily morally superior to anger and resentment.<sup>54</sup> Anger and resentment instigate the search for the underlying epistemic causes of and justifications for an atrocity, which is deeper than seeking truth about what happened.

Anger and resentment as a consequence of having been violated and brutalized indicate respect for the self and are an expression that the wrongdoing should not have occurred. As Jeffrie Murphy notes, 'resentment stands as emotional testimony that we care about ourselves and our rights.'<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, 'not to have resentment when our rights are violated conveys either that we do not think we have rights or that we do not take our rights very seriously.'<sup>56</sup> This is not to say that victims should wallow in anger and resentment, but indicates that anger and resentment should not be dismissed or condemned a priori or simplistically. They should be acknowledged and transformed as they point to a desired value system. Apology and forgiveness should thus not dismiss or suppress them, because to do so might undermine healing, which is at the centre of reconciliation. Similarly, Nicholas Wolterstorff notes that anger over being wronged is a good thing in the emotional life of the victim.<sup>57</sup> It is recognition of having been treated unjustly. He adds that there is something sadly defective about people who fail to recognize when they are wronged, or whose recognition is so purely intellectual that they are emotionally indifferent. These people are unaware of their worth, indifferent to their worth or unaware of when they are being treated with disrespect.

Denying the legitimacy of victims' feelings of resentment denigrates and disrespects them, which is an aim of violence. It also ignores the fact that the acts were wrong and harmed the victims, who did not deserve to be hurt. Resentment and related feelings are thus justified in such a context.<sup>58</sup> Once these feelings are acknowledged, what needs to be transformed becomes clear. Clamouring for apologies and forgiveness as ends in themselves, without demanding practical and, more importantly, epistemic measures, such as transformation of hostile and toxic discourses, narratives, assumptions, beliefs, ideas and ideologies, can result in naive complicity in the maintenance of oppression and injustice. Forgiveness in the presence of continued wrongdoing does not make sense. It only makes sense in a situation where wrongdoing is the exception rather than being systematic and ongoing. In contexts where demands for an apology and expectations of forgiveness are set against a background of political violence, transforming hostile and toxic discourses,

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Murphy, *supra* n 36 at 19.

56 Brudholm, *supra* n 42 at 17.

57 Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Place of Forgiveness in the Actions of the State,' in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, ed. Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

58 Govier and Verwoerd, *supra* n 31.



narratives and the like, as well as creating a democratic and just environment free from violence, are better demands than a simple public apology.

Acknowledging anger and resentment draws attention to why apologies should be transformative by asking what went wrong, how it happened and how it should be addressed going forward. Furthermore, resentment is a demonstration of commitment to certain moral standards as regulative of social life.<sup>59</sup> Thus, on the one hand, transformative apology promises to enact the values, discourses, narratives, ideas, ideologies and assumptions that have been disrupted by violence. On the other, transformative forgiveness demands and expects anger and resentment, not necessarily as a precondition for forgiveness, because it is not contingent on them, but because they facilitate breaking the cycle of violence as well as sustainable reconciliation. However, this is not to suggest that the one forgiving cannot demand transformation and justice, including retributive justice. Wolterstorff argues that those who have been wronged acquire the right to retributive justice and it is up to them to forgo it or not, or to forgo some aspects and not others. This suggests that forgiveness can take different forms and be of different degrees.<sup>60</sup> Thus, victims may forgo punishment of the offender while still harbouring anger, or may forgo both punishment of the perpetrator and their own anger, or may work at eliminating their anger while insisting that the perpetrator is punished. This perspective supports Kathleen Moore's definition of forgiveness as the attitude of one who has been injured towards the one who inflicted the injury.<sup>61</sup> An attitude of forgiveness is characterized by the presence of goodwill or by the lack of resentment for the injury, thus one can forgive while punishing. Wolterstorff and Moore differ in that the former conceives of forgiveness as a resolution and the latter as an attitude. In my view, both converge on the idea that, in the end, it is possible to both forgive and punish. The victim should not be expected to 'reframe' their perspective of the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer, and to forgive just because an apology has been offered.

Remorse and repentance are often cited as central to apologies and vital elements for forgiveness.<sup>62</sup> While I concede that they are important, they should not be the determining factor for forgiveness because they take away agency from victims, making them dependent on perpetrators fulfilling these expectations. Furthermore, remorse and repentance can pressurize victims to forgive, especially if failing to do so is viewed as a moral deficiency on their part.<sup>63</sup> When forgiveness is given under pressure, it is simplistic and uncritical and thus bound to be superficial and shallow, not transformative. Forgiveness that sidesteps the transformation of conditions that perpetuate injustice may produce injustice, maintain inequality or weaken moral

59 Richard J. Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

60 Wolterstorff, *supra* n 57.

61 Kathleen Dean Moore, *Pardons: Justice, Mercy, and the Public Interest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

62 See, Mark R. Amstutz, 'Restorative Justice, Political Forgiveness, and the Possibility of Political Reconciliation,' in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, ed. Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

63 David Campton, 'Divine and Human: Nurturing a Spirituality and a Culture of Forgiveness,' in *Divided Past, Shared Future: Essays on Churches Addressing the Legacy of the Troubles*, ed. David Campton and Nigel Biggar (Belfast: Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland, 2008).

commitments.<sup>64</sup> It thus eventually ends up maintaining or reproducing conditions that occasioned the injustice, so creating a vicious circle.

### DENIAL AND SILENCE IN THE FACE OF ATROCITIES

For apology and forgiveness not to be at odds with broader transitional justice and reconciliation processes such as truth seeking, they should factor in not only knowledge but also acknowledgement of past atrocities.<sup>65</sup> This is in contrast to denying past atrocities by justifying or excusing them. According to Stanley Cohen, denial can be *literal*, *interpretive* or *implicatory*.<sup>66</sup> Literal denial refers to disputing the truth or recovery of factual claims, for instance, officials refusing claims of torture during a conflict. This is not the case in respect of Gukurahundi, as there is a general consensus that wrong was done. Interpretive denial refers to scenarios where actions or events are redescribed in order to appear less extreme. This is done using technical jargon, such as 'regrettable excesses' instead of 'torture,' and 'transfers of populations' instead of 'forced expulsions.'<sup>67</sup> In relation to Gukurahundi, it is not uncommon to hear the justification that it was necessary because there was a security threat in the country and the government could not let the situation get out of control. This is a form of reframing, whereby the wrongdoer is viewed in context with the intention of creating understanding of the pressures faced by the perpetrator at the time of the wrongdoing.<sup>68</sup> Regarding denial of the magnitude of atrocities, what exactly happened during Gukurahundi and how many people were killed remain contested. Mnangagwa has disputed that 20,000 people were killed during Gukurahundi.<sup>69</sup> Human rights organizations that produce such evidence are alleged to be sponsored by enemies of the state that seek to undermine it. Such disputes place the apology process and forgiveness in a difficult, although not impossible, situation. This highlights the need to clarify and settle issues and facts before simplistically demanding or offering an apology. For its part, implicatory denial refers to the failure to recognize and acknowledge the significance of what one witnesses, knows or does.<sup>70</sup> Such a scenario exists regarding Gukurahundi. Some people implicated as perpetrators in Gukurahundi argue that they did not know the significance of what was happening. For example, former vice president Joice Mujuru admitted in an interview that she had knowledge of the government's involvement in Gukurahundi atrocities but at the time was a junior minister who had no powers to stop the carnage carried out by the 5th Brigade.<sup>71</sup> Mujuru effectively shrugged off responsibility and refused to be

64 Saunders, *supra* n 35.

65 Ruth Murambadoro, "We Cannot Reconcile Until the Past Has Been Acknowledged": Perspectives on Gukurahundi from Matabeleland, Zimbabwe,' *Accord*, 9 March 2015, <http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/we-cannot-reconcile-until-the-past-has-been-acknowledged/> (accessed 28 February 2019).

66 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

67 Colleen Murphy, *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

68 See, Enright et al., *supra* n 43.

69 'President Mnangagwa's Interview,' *supra* n 17.

70 Murphy, *supra* n 67.

71 News24, 'I Knew about Gukurahundi Atrocities, Mujuru Says,' 15 March 2017, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/i-knew-about-gukurahundi-atrocities-mujuru-says-20170315> (accessed 28 February 2019).

implicated in the massacres. Knowledge and acknowledgement thus stand as the starting points for transformative apology and forgiveness. If they are absent, talking about transforming discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies is a nonstarter, because there is no acknowledgement of that which is overt let alone that which is covert.

Another factor that stands in the way of knowledge and acknowledgement is perpetrators' silence, understood as the 'socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken.'<sup>72</sup> While silence, for some, may be pragmatic and at times a successful strategy for coexistence, in postwar contexts it can be counterproductive in that it separates offenders and victims.<sup>73</sup> Silence in such contexts can constitute further wounding of the victim because, contrary to being the opposite of a speech act, it is an active form of communication which can be interpreted as arrogance.<sup>74</sup> Cheryl Lawther interprets silence as *passivity*, *loyalty* or *pragmatism*. As passivity, silence is understood as the 'absence of reaction' by 'those who have seen, known or heard about the situation, yet have still not reacted.'<sup>75</sup> As loyalty, silence refers to being faithful to the powers that be or to the system in place that might have committed the atrocities. Breaking the silence can therefore be viewed as a betrayal. As pragmatism, silence is a deliberate choice to suspend or truncate conflict over the meaning or justification of past violence.<sup>76</sup> Silence regarding Gukurahundi can be interpreted in all these ways.

Mnangagwa and his regime can be accused of silence as passivity because they do not act meaningfully and yet are aware of Gukurahundi and its negative effects. They can be accused of silence as loyalty by not 'selling out' the regime that committed the crimes and that is in power. Lastly, they can be accused of silence as pragmatism by suggesting that digging deeper into Gukurahundi might destabilize the state. This was the excuse or justification for not releasing the Chihambakwe report on Gukurahundi.<sup>77</sup> This approach gets in the way of transformative apology, not only because the truth is not given a chance, but, as with denial, because talking about transforming discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies is a nonstarter when nothing is said, the truth is not told and there is no acknowledgement of that which is overt let alone the covert epistemic foundations.

Only when there is knowledge and acknowledgement will Gukurahundi victims know whom to forgive and for what, if they decide to base their forgiveness on that. The daughter of an activist who was killed during apartheid concretizes this need. When asked during the TRC if she wanted to know who killed her father, she answered: 'We do want to forgive but we don't know whom to forgive.'<sup>78</sup> Knowing

72 Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

73 Marita Eastmond and Johanna Mannergren Selimovic, 'Silence as Possibility in Postwar Everyday Life,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6(3) (2012): 502–524.

74 Cheryl Lawther, 'Denial, Silence and the Politics of the Past: Unpicking the Opposition to Truth Recovery in Northern Ireland,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7(1) (2013): 157–177.

75 Ibid., 169.

76 Ibid.

77 See, Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (London: Routledge, 2011).

78 Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999).

who perpetrated violations can help victims move towards forgiveness. This does not mean, however, that there can be no forgiveness without this knowledge. Truth telling can also uncover numerous secrets, such as unrevealed disappearances. In the case of Gukurahundi, where a lot remains unknown, survivors want to know what happened to their deceased family and friends. They want to know how the army, police and secret agencies operated. Only in such circumstances can an apology initiate action instead of being mere rhetoric. Truth telling provides solid information to deal with the epistemic foundations of brutality. An apology thus gets connected to ensuring lasting reconciliation by guarding against future occurrences of the offences apologized for; providing a basis to mete out justice; addressing the wounds of ignorance<sup>79</sup> by revealing the truth about their circumstances; providing public recognition that victims' rights were violated; and paving the way to address the bedrock of brutality. Similarly, forgiveness that is grounded in knowledge and acknowledgement becomes transformative because it does not overlook the need to restore deeper positive discourses, narratives, mentalities, ideas, ideologies and values.

An important condition in the process of apologies is the participation of the wronged, both as victims of the atrocities and as recipients of the apology. Productive transformative forgiveness allows victims to tell their stories and demonstrate anger and resentment. Through this, victims demonstrate the values they subscribe to, which transformative apology needs to take into consideration. Forgiveness that does not use the information gathered to advocate for the transformation of underlying conditions is bound to be ineffective because it does not factor in the need to break the recurrence of violence in the broader sociopolitical environment which emerges from victims' stories. Truth telling and information gathering place the onus on victims to ensure a credible basis for knowledge and acknowledgement. Apologies therefore validate past experiences and restore the dignity and self-esteem of victims. On that basis, perpetrators and victims offer apologies and forgiveness aimed not only at personal change but also at the broader sociopolitical environment by casting light on and transforming the conditions that caused the wrongdoing. Zimbabwe currently has a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission whose mandate includes inquiring into the Matabeleland and Midlands massacres with the view to advising the president on what course of action to take to address this issue. This commission takes its cue from truth commissions whose mandates are

to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to specific needs of victims, to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past.<sup>80</sup>

A comprehensive consultative process, such as that of the commission, should prioritize the participation of victims and encourage them to tell their stories, as this

79 Daniel Philpott, 'Beyond Politics as Usual: Is Reconciliation Compatible with Liberalism?' in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, ed. Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

80 Hayner, *supra* n 77 at 24.

can form the foundation for reworking and transforming negative discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies.

Silence and denial are thus direct affronts to knowledge and acknowledgement. They result in the absence of knowledge that forms the basis for understanding the underlying issues that facilitated wrongdoing and that require transformation. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to rework or transform negative conditions to ensure that the same wrongdoing is not repeated. While forgiveness is not based on or necessarily connected to the transformation of negative conditions, it can be enabled and facilitated by it.

## CONCLUSION

Transformative apology and forgiveness consider the act of wrongdoing to be supported by particular discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies which need to be transformed in order for apology and forgiveness to contribute to preventing a recurrence of violence and to facilitate sustainable reconciliation. Transformative apology and forgiveness address the act of wrongdoing through reparation but also by transforming the negative, toxic and hostile conditions that justified it. This ensures that the epistemic foundations do not result in a repeat of the same. However, apology and forgiveness are susceptible to abuse. Apology can be self-serving, insincere, counterproductive and inappropriate, and forgiveness can gloss over justice. Apologies need to be carefully crafted and thoroughly implemented. They are not wholly about the past, but also about the future. A process of reflection, for instance through problem-posing and transformative workshops, to interrogate what went wrong as well as the conditions that justified the wrongdoing must accompany a statement of apology. An apology is therefore a process, not an event. The actual issuance of the apology might be a short event, but it should initiate a process showing commitment to reform.<sup>81</sup>

Transformative apology and forgiveness put victims' voices and experiences at the centre, without burdening them. To put pressure on a victim to forgive or overcome resentment (internal changes) may overlook the deep and fundamental, as well as external, changes that are needed in the aftermath of brutality. Asking for an apology as a publicity stunt, without a comprehensive process taking place, might result in forcing survivors to forgive, thus undermining sustainable justice and reconciliation. The primary concern of the apology should not only be to end injustice or oppression but also to address the epistemic bedrock of that injustice or oppression.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, the primary concern of forgiveness must be the transformation of conditions that perpetuate injustice. Chief among these conditions is violence and its epistemic bedrock. After Mnangagwa's statement in Davos, critics seemed to be urging him, 'Say sorry and you will be forgiven.' However, this is a weak and simplistic perspective of reconciliation, susceptible to manipulating victims. What is overlooked in such propositions is that an apology does not necessarily exonerate the offender from facing retributive justice. As noted, an apology can be responded to with forgiveness, but without eschewing punishment. To forgive is not to eradicate retributive justice.

81 Govier and Verwoerd, *supra* n 1.

82 Murphy, *supra* n 67.

Forgiveness can coexist with punishments like imprisonment. It is possible for a victim to forgive while the perpetrator remains in prison or the victim pursues prosecution.<sup>83</sup> Instead of being the basis of reconciliation, the stage at which forgiveness enters the reconciliation process should be determined by the context. Thus, to blame victims for not forgiving following an apology is to pursue a self-fulfilling exercise, that is, to initiate a process whose response is predetermined.

This article argued that calls for apology and forgiveness should take into account what they imply, lest they are abused or their full potential not explored. Apologies that are divorced from practical amends such as truth seeking, truth telling, justice, reparations and accountability, with a view to a positive and different future, risk appearing insincere and may thus not be positively received by victims. Connecting apologies to truth seeking is not to suggest that they have to corroborate a factual record, but to argue that apologies are more effective when they are founded on knowledge and acknowledgement. If apologies are not positively received by victims, forgiveness is undermined. To call for an apology without knowledge and acknowledgement of the atrocities is to engage in a baseless exercise whose possible link to forgiveness gets compromised. An apology should be transformative, in other words, accompanied by clear programmes of action or amends that have the potential not only to influence a positive attitude change in victims and elicit their forgiveness – even though forgiveness does not depend on apology – but also to unearth and transform negative, hostile and toxic discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies into positive ones that promote healing, peace and reconciliation. Transformation leads to attitudinal change, which is key for restoring broken relationships. Calls for impromptu apologies and forgiveness do not serve the real needs of victims. In-front-of-the-cameras apologies serve the interests of the political elite, who can easily manipulate the apology and forgiveness at the expense of victims, thereby re-wounding them.

83 Saunders, *supra* n 35.